



Department of Justice

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PRESIDENT OF A COLORADO COMPANY
CHARGED WITH WIRE FRAUD

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- A Boulder, Colorado man was charged today with wire fraud in connection with an attempt to rig bids for the sale of petroleum pipeline accessories to one of his company's customers, the Department of Justice announced. In a one-count felony case filed in U.S. District Court in Denver, Benjamin C. Buette, Jr., owner and president of Western Measurement Equipment Company, Inc., a distributor of petroleum pipeline accessories such as flowmeters and strainers, was charged with committing wire fraud in November 2000.

According to the charge, Buette devised a scheme to defraud a customer, Conoco, Inc. and its subsidiaries, of monies by attempting to rig a bid for the supply of petroleum pipeline accessories used by Conoco to maintain, repair, and expand its North Salt Lake City facility in Utah. In attempting to carry out the scheme, the charge states that Buette knowingly and willfully made a telephone call from Denver, Colorado to another distributor of petroleum pipeline accessories located outside Colorado.

"This type of scheme deprives companies of their right to honest and fair competition in the purchase of equipment essential to their operations," said James M. Griffin, Deputy Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Antitrust Division's Criminal Enforcement Program.

Today's charge arose from an investigation being conducted jointly by the Antitrust Division's Chicago Field Office and the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Denver, with assistance from the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Colorado and the Colorado State Attorney General's Office.

Buette is charged with violating 18 U.S.C. § 1343 (wire fraud), which carries a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine. The maximum fine may be increased to twice the gain derived from the crime or twice the loss suffered by the victims of the crime, if either of those amounts is greater than the statutory maximum fine.

Anyone with information concerning bid rigging on the sale of petroleum pipeline accessories should contact the Antitrust Division's Chicago Field Office at (312) 353-7530. Violations may also be reported through the Antitrust Division's website at <http://www.usdoj.gov/atr/contact/newcase.htm>.

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